

ON THE
FRENCH REVOLUTION.

A MORAL

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E S S A Y

ON THE RIGHTS OF MAN.

By JAMES MAXWELL,

POET IN PAISLEY.

*Who can the Sov'reign power of GOD withstand?
Or who repel the word of his command?*

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ON THE

FRENCH REVOLUTION, &c.

TREMBLE, ye Potentates throughout the globe,
While mankind of their nat'ral rights ye rob :
Here learn a lesson from this great event,
And of your folly now in time repent.
Consider there's a POTENTATE on high,
Who on your conduct keeps a watchful eye.
He in a moment can bring down your pride,
And make your boasting powers at once subside ;
Without a word, without a creature's aid,
Shall all your glory in the dust be laid !
In vain of wide dominions now you boast,
How far extended is your utmost coast—
Your subjects num'rous, ready at command,
Who can your will, or purposes withstand ?
Yet, ah, how vain is such aspiring thought,
All in one day may be to ruin brought !
Men look on such events with deep surprize,
But seldom think the RULER of the skies
O'er-turns the counsels of the great and wise ;
But all attribute to some second cause,
Regardless of their Great CREATOR's laws ;
Which neither men nor devils can resist,
Tho' earth and hell should altogether 'list.
Vain are their efforts—all their projects vain ;
For all are bound by his Almighty chain,
Whereby he turns them wheresoe'er he please,
According to his own divine decrees.

Witness Belshazzar, at his impious feast,
 Feasting and drinking like a thoughtless beast :
 Profanely boasting ; void of any fear,
 Without expecting any danger near ;
 Till, lo, a hand he saw upon the wall,
 Writing with fingers, which foretold his fall.
 In that same night was his whole empire ta'en,
 And he himself, and all his army slain !
 Yea, yet more recent proofs did GOD advance,
 In that GREAT REVOLUTION made in FRANCE !
 Who could have thought that such a potent Prince
 Would such a wondrous change at once evince ?
 When he a Despot was, of high renown,
 And all his people trembled at his frown.
 His will alone the source of ev'ry law,
 To keep his subjects all in rev'rent awe :
 Two strong supporters he could also shew,
 The Aristocracy and Priesthood too,
 Heritable his Kingdom long had been
 For ages past : no danger could be seen.
 His two supporters shar'd to fleece the flock,
 Such threefold cord could not be easy broke,
 To all appearance, it appear'd so strong,
 Moreover, it had thus continued long,
 And scarce a subject durst even think it wrong ;
 Much less to speak his mind, he thought it so,
 Or he to the BASTILLE was sure to go.

Nay, they were taught, and gen'rally believ'd
 That all was right, howe'er the king behav'd—
 That King and Priesthood could do nothing wrong,
 And to resist was thought rebellion strong.
 The King had pow'r of corp'ral punishment,
 And by the Priests their souls to hell were sent.

These notions were so gen'rally believ'd,
 That few or none thought they were thus deceiv'd
 And if they gave obedience to these three,
 The King, the Priest and Aristocracy :
 'Twas then no matter almost what they did,
 If they forbore whatever these forbid :

Only to rob, or murder, for such crimes,
 They were expos'd to suffer death sometimes;
 Unless they prov'd they had such crimes committed
 Against vile heretics: then were they 'quitted:
 But if against the holy Catholics,
 They had been guilty of such noxious tricks;
 Then were they punish'd to the last degree,
 And put to death with horrid cruelty.

Such were their laws before the Revolution,
 All justice there was stain'd with sad pollution;
 Regardless of the rights of GOD or Man,
 They still pursu'd this proud imperious plan:
 For from the Pope they had a dispensation,
 To break their leagues with ev'ry other nation,
 Whene'er they found it suited their occasion. }
 Their oaths and promises they might recal,
 Whene'er they found them inconvenient fall.
 And well the Pope such privilege might grant,
 Or ought beside they could desire or want.
 For, lo, their King was deem'd his first-born son,
 Therefore 'twas right whate'er by him was done.
 Besides from France he had of rev'nue clear,
 Above four hundred thousand pounds a-year:
 Therefore, Most Christian Majesty was he,
 Worthy of honour to the last degree.
 Thus grew their Kings intolerably proud,
 And this by all their conduct long they shew'd.
 They reign'd like tyrants, absolute in sway,
 And high and low were forced to obey.
 Their subjects, thus inur'd, so tame were grown,
 That very few durst call their lives their own.
 From age to age long this had been their case,
 That most of them could slavery now embrace;
 And seldom grumbled at their galling yoke,
 A word of that durst hardly e'er be spoke.

A prison too they had, of vast extent,
 To which they were in danger to be sent:
 Especially, those of the higher sort,
 Who had offended any one at court;

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 To which they were in danger to be sent:
 Especially, those of the higher sort,
 Who had offended any one at court;

For such, a warrant soon must be procur'd,
 To get them in the BASTILLE quick secur'd;
 Without informing them the reason why,
 And right or wrong they must be forc'd away.
 Nor would they let them know for what offence—
 What must be done with them, or when come thence.
 But there they must be cruelly confin'd,
 Until their prosecutors chang'd their mind.
 It might be months, or years, or ev'n for life,
 Unknown perhaps to either friend or wife.
 And whether true or false their accusation,
 Yet they could not obtain their liberation.
 Pen, ink and paper were to them denied :
 T' inform their friends, no way could be applied.

Thus no appeal could be by any made,
 Nor any could be found for them to plead.
 In vain would any ask what was the cause,
 Or how they had transgress'd their Sov'reign's laws.
 No answer could they get, but chang'd, Be still,
 And wait with patience on the Monarch's will.
 And ev'n the Monarch knew perhaps no more
 Of them, than those upon the Indian shore.
 Here must you be, said they, till he thinks fit.
 And some were thrust into a horrid pit.
 There must they languish out their wretched lives
 Unknown to any, whether friends or wives.

No messages or letters could they send,
 Or any way acquaint their nearest friend.
 Nay, if they knew, no friend could them come near,
 To comfort them, their broken hearts to cheer.
 And in this prison was a monstrous cage,
 Of massy ir'n, so when they were in rage,
 The objects of their spite were put in there,
 To lie and pine, and languish in despair.—
 Helpless and hopeless they were forc'd to lie,
 Till many did in that same posture die.
 No friendly eye was suffer'd them to see,
 Nor any to abate their miserie.
 To friends and to acquaintance as if dead,
 Unknown as if the sea had been their bed.

Now this hell-cage so strong and large was made,
 That threescore tons of ir'n at last it weigh'd !
 And this great prison it was call'd, **BASTILLE**,
 Amazing strong, and huge the infernal pile !
 Long had it stood the terror of mankind,
 And many thousands had been there confin'd !
 And many more, if longer it had stood,
 Might have been there depriv'd of earthly good.
 But Heav'n saw fit it should no longer stand,
 To be the terror of that spacious land.

All on a sudden God inspir'd mankind,
 To execute the vengeance he design'd.
 He saw the throne all cover'd with pollution ;
 His time was come to cause a Revolution.

Tho' nought could seem a more unlikely thing,
 When all were so submissive to their King.
 The people here had so obsequious been,
 The like had scarce in any land been seen.
 For ev'ry man submissively obey'd,
 And all was law whate'er the Monarch said.
 Whate'er they suffer'd, all with patience bore,
 And not a soul durst raise a plaintive rore.

But see what GOD's Almighty pow'r can do !
 Soon he can bring the haughtiest mortal low !
 For all at once resolv'd to break the yoke ;
 And by command of Heav'n 'twas quickly broke.
 By sea and land they all their arms laid down,
 And scarcely one the King's command would own !
 What could he do ? he could no more withstand !
 When none would him obey by sea or land !

At last he yielded to the nations will—
 Promis'd their just desires all to fulfil :
 For had he not, his head in danger stood,
 And they had surely shed his vital blood.

A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY then was chose,
 When like a flood the Kingdom all uprose.
 And first of all they storm'd the **GREAT BASTILLE**,
 And soon demolish'd that infernal pile !
 This they effected with a powerful hand,
 Nor left a stone thereof in place to stand—

Set free the abject pris'ners there confin'd,
 Nor left it more a terror to mankind.
 The Governor thereof was sore dismay'd,
 Him quickly they cut shorter by the head.
 And neither judge nor jury needed they,
 For all his crimes before them open lay.

But, O what aspect here the pris'ners made;
 They seem'd like men just rais'd from the dead!
 Tho' gentlemen and lords of high renown,
 Who many years no liberty had known.
 How glad were they to taste the open air,
 And be deliver'd from their long despair.
 But, ah, too late to be restor'd again
 To what they were: this can they ne'er obtain.
 Now by confinement they were alter'd so,
 That scarce their visage any one could know!

O horrid scene of barb'rous cruelty,
 So long in wretched misery to be!
 To them this liberty must needs be sweet,
 Tho' former happiness was incomplete!
 No doubt they thought it ample happiness,
 To be deliver'd from such dire distress.
 And, O how happy, and how highly pleas'd,
 To see their prison's first foundation raz'd!
 Heav'n then saw fit to raze the infernal pile,
 And straight no stone was left of the BASTILLE
 Upon another! all were swept away,
 And not a vestige left thereof this day!
 The time was come: the time that GOD had set,
 Nor does he e'er his purposes forget.
 He on a sudden put it in their heart,
 That they should not leave there the smallest part!

This was the first, and necessary plan,
 The Nation could adopt for GOD and Man:
 For this GOD's glory far display'd abroad,
 And eas'd mankind of this tyrannic rod
 [O had we seen the pris'ners when releas'd,
 How miserably they had been disgrac'd,
 By long confinement in that curs'd hold;
 It surely would have made our blood run cold!

Some quite depriv'd almost of ev'ry sense,
 Before they found a sweet deliv'rance thence !
 Some blind and deaf; their locks and beards turn'd grey.
 Both halt and maim'd, and haggard looks had they !]

Now they began upon a righteous cause,
 Namely, to make and 'stablish wholesome laws.
 The former had been found a cruel yoke,
 'Twas more than time these wholly to revoke.
 The kingdom had been wasted and destroy'd,
 And several provinces almost laid void.
 By arbitrary pow'r and priest-craft join'd,
 The Nation was with fore oppression pin'd :
 'Twas therefore time to change those cursed laws,
 And to defend the just and righteous cause.
 Altho' the King was not so much to blame,
 His predecessors having made the same ;
 And long had rul'd by these same cruel laws,
 Trampling upon the just and righteous cause.
 He therefore did but as before was done,
 When he receiv'd the Galic crown and throne :
 He thought he might the self-same track pursue,
 Which his ancestors long before him drew.

But GOD had open'd now the people's eyes,
 To see and feel their wretched miseries.
 One mean hereof, AMERICA had shown,
 Before their eyes, how they their load had thrown.
 Much had their King done to promote that cause,
 And justly for that same rewarded was.
 The time was come for this most strange event,
 Their finances were almost gone and spent.
 And if the LORD had not brought this about,
 The kingdom had been bankrupt, without doubt !
 AMERICA they saw her chains had broke,
 And was deliver'd from Monarchial yoke.
 And now as FRANCE was deeper far involv'd,
 To break their yoke the people all resolv'd :
 To break the bonds of Gallic slavery,
 And taste the sweets of man's just liberty.

But here was an unseen, Almighty Hand,
 Tho' little hereof many understand ;

Like Cyrus, who releas'd the captive Jews,
 Tho' he of Isra'l's God had then no views:
 Yet was it he that girded him with might,
 And made him most victorious in the fight:
 Yet notwithstanding Cyrus knew him not,
 And of his hand (unseen) had he no tho't.

So most men now attribute all events
 To their own valour, and their wise intents,
 Forgetful that there is a hand unseen
 That turns the wheels, both outward and within.
 'Twas the Almighty, no man needs to doubt,
 That brought this unforeseen event about
 What else could make all men almost in FRANCE,
 Concur in such a mighty scheme at once?
 They seem'd to be the most unlikely nation,
 That could be thought of for such alteration,
 Who had to slav'ry been so long inur'd,
 And had submissively so long endur'd:
 Yet all at once resolv'd to break the yoke,
 And by one bold effort they got it broke.

Soon as they had demolish'd the BASTILLE,
 And scatter'd all that dire infernal pile,
 They then began to regulate the laws,
 And to espouse the just and righteous cause.
 New laws they made upon an upright plan,
 For GOD's own glory and the good of man.
 Namely that men should worship GOD aright,
 According as their conscience gave them light;
 And that they should constrained be by none,
 But be accountable to GOD alone.

This they conceiv'd the scriptures have made plain,
 That none another's conscience may constrain.
 To judge another's servant, who art thou?
 And who to thee did right, thee to allow?
 To his own Master he shall stand or fall,
 And none beside can him in question call.
 For civil constitution too they made,
 That no man should another's right invade.
 And as for cruel Aristocracy,
 They made a law it should no longer be.

And arbitrary pow'r there should be none,
 Neither in plural numbers nor in one.
 Titles of grandeur too they banish'd quite,
 That none should be a Duke, Lord, Count, or Knight.
 Against these childish nicknames was there plan,
 All should resume the dignity of man :
 Upon an equal footing all should be,
 And none should be of high and low degree.
 All corporation laws they banish'd quite,
 As incompatible with mankind's right :
 That any man might follow any trade,
 Whereby he could procure him honest bread,
 In any town or city any where,
 They could obtain it honestly and fair ;
 If they liv'd peaceably and subject was,
 Unto those just and equitable laws.

And for game laws they made this special bound,
 All might kill game on their own proper ground ;
 But not one step can any farther go,
 Than his own land-mark, all are bounded so.

And whatsoe'er contention may fall out,
 'Twixt man and man ; to finish all dispute ;
 A committee appointed is to hear
 Both parties, and the matter straight to clear.
 Thus no litigious law-suit can commence
 To ruin people with a long expence.
 How many here have almost ruin'd been,
 By such litigious courts as we have heard and seen ?
 O HAPPY REVOLUTION, this in FRANCE !
 It surely will that Nation high advance.
 O gracious Heav'n, such blessings far extend,
 Let wars and all contentions have an end !

And now the GREAT ASSEMBLY of the Nation
 Made this Illustrious Noble Declaration :
 We Representatives of all in FRANCE,
 Chosen by them, their proper rights t' advance,
 Consid'ring how thro' ignorance and pride,
 The Rights of Mankind have been turn'd aside ;
 Or else thro' bold contempt and negligence,
 Such things have caus'd our troubles to commence.

Sole causes these of our misfortunes all,
 That do at present on this Nation fall.
 Because all human rights were disregarded,
 Virtue despis'd, and glaring vice rewarded.

We therefore seeing such abomination,
 Now issue forth this Solemn Declaration,
 That these, man's nat'ral rights may always be
 Before each Member's face continually;
 And that this Declaration always may
 Be for a standard, to direct their way.
 And let the body social, as one man,
 Keep still in view this equitable plan;
 That all the rights and duties of mankind,
 Be duly guarded with an upright mind:
 That every act of legislative pow'r,
 May be examin'd freely ev'ry hour.
 And found to be impartially upright,
 Without iniquity in mankind's sight.
 For this Assembly doth it recognize,
 Before the GOD of Truth that spread the skies;
 And in the presence of the King Supreme,
 Imploring too his blessing on the same;
 That he may favour this our good design,
 And crown our labours with his grace divine;
 That so the sacred rights of men may be
 Confirmed by his holy wise decree.

I. As all mankind free citizens are born,
 So may they still continue unforlorn;
 Equal in rights, if rightly they behave,
 As honest men, magnanimous and brave.
 Civil distinctions then can only be
 Founded upon their great utility.

II. The end of civil government is then
 Truth to defend, and guard the rights of men.
 These rights are precious nat'ral liberty—
 Secure their property, and keep them free }
 From all oppression, to the last degree.

III. The Nation is essentially the source
 Of human sov'reignty, and so of course

No man, nor more can this dominion have,
But what they from the Nation must receive.

IV. Politick Liberty allows no pow'r
Of doing what may other's hurt procure.
It can no Legislature authorize
To hinder men freely to exercise
The nat'ral rights that unto them belong.
Whereby they injure none, not old nor young.
These are the limits whereby all are bound,
Determin'd by the law of equity most sound.

V. The law cannot prohibit what is free,
When not injurious to society:
Therefore what's not forbidden by the law,
Can no man into condemnation draw.

VI. The law is but th' expression of the will
Of the community: then to fulfil
The precepts thereof; all are strictly bound,
Or they are liable to get a wound.
For by themselves, or representers—they
Are makers of the law, and ought t' obey,
For all are equally eligible
If they have talents proper to fulfil
Places of honour, or of highest trust,
If their abilities are fit and just:
But if they are unfit for such a place,
And be not call'd thereto; 'tis no disgrace.
And may be fit for this and not for that,
Then no man ought to be displeas'd thereat.

VII. No man should be accus'd, nor yet arrested,
Nor be confin'd nor otherwise molested,
Except in cases where the law directs—
To punish faulters; but the just protects.
All who promote, solicit do, or cause
Ought to be done contrary to the laws
Ought to be punish'd, and cut off betimes,
According to the nature of their crimes.
And ev'ry one when called to appear,
Ought to attend, and yield obedient ear;
Or if he's apprehended ought t' obey,
Else he's more culpable if he gainsay.

VIII. The law ought to impose no penalties,
 But such as are entirely just and wise :
 Such as are absolutely necessary,
 And nothing to extremities must carry.
 And none ought to be punish'd less or more,
 But for the breach of laws made known before.
 Then let the law be legally applied,
 And nowise warped into either side.

IX. All men must be accounted innocent,
 And quite exempted from all punishment,
 Till once convicted of some noxious crime,
 They have committed at some certain time.
 When their detention is become at last,
 Quite indispensable for what is past ;
 All cruel rigour must be yet restrain'd,
 But what is needful to have them detain'd,
 This ought to be provided for by law,
 Only to keep transgressors still in awe.

X. No man ought to be any way molested,
 For his opinions, tho' they be detested ;
 Whether of civil or religious kind,
 If he be peaceable ; no wise inclin'd
 To raise disturbances among mankind. }
 If otherwise, the law may then commence,
 To take cognizance of his bold offence.

XI. The free communication of the mind,
 Thoughts and opinions to be unconfin'd,
 Is sure one of the precious rights of man,
 And none can countermand this noble plan.
 Therefore may men speak, write and publish free, }
 Yet, lo, they still responsible must be, }
 For each abuse of this their liberty,
 In ev'ry case determin'd by the law,
 Else punishment on their own heads they draw.

XII. A public force must needs provided be,
 To guard the rights of men and keep them free.
 That force is order'd for the benefit
 Of the community, to keep them right :
 Not for the benefit of those entrusted
 With management thereof to be adjusted.

XIII. A common contribution, then of course
Must needs be rais'd to support this force :
And for the sustenance of Government,
Which strict frugality cannot prevent,
Which ought to be divided equally,
Among the members of community,
According to their just abilities
Of usefulness, in proper just degrees.

XIV. Now ev'ry one of the community,
Have right to speak his mind, with modesty ;
Or by his own, or by his agent's voice,
Of free delib'rating on what's made choice,
What contributions necessary are,
And how they should expended be, and where—
The manner of assessment—their duration,
All should be done with due deliberation.

XV. 'Tis right and just communities should have
Right to suspect how agents there behave :
And call them to account if right or wrong,
Such pow'r to all communities belong.

XVI. Communities, who under sep'rate pow'rs
Are rul'd, yet no security procures
Of legal rights, they're void of constitution,
And surely stand in need of revolution.

XVII. Man's right to property is sacred still
And nowise subject to a Sov'reign's will.
And this no King, nor Members of a State,
Have any right at all to alienate ;
Except in cases of necessity,
Making the owners full indemnity.

To this effect th' Assembly of the Nation,
Exhibited their Noble Declaration.
The King at last consented to the same,
And gave his sanction to concur with them.

This was a noble effort, with success,
Which eas'd the Nation from its deep distress.
Let this a lesson be to ev'ry land,
For their own rights and liberties to stand ;

And never yield to bold oppressive pow'r,
 Whose pride and avarice would all devour.
 This is the case of most European Nations,
 Long have they suffer'd many sore vexations;
 But they're almost ready at the last,
 The galling yoke from off their necks to cast.
 This all the Potent pow'rs begin to see,
 Their vassals all are wanting to get free.
 This makes the oppressors tremble, fear and dread,
 Lest they should in the Gallic footsteps tread.
 Fain would they join their sev'ral pow'rs at once
 To crush this noble spirit rais'd in France;
 But fear forbids them such wild enterprize,
 Lest their own subjects should against them rise.
 Long have they threaten'd, but they still forbear,
 But France stands boldly void of panic fear.
 And GOD, I hope, will their protector be,
 If they put trust in him they shall be free.
 But if they trust in any arm of flesh,
 They may be yet to bondage brought afresh.
 Which GOD forbid, and still their rights defend,
 So shall they be victorious to the end.

FINIS.



